

Ryan Padraig Kelly World

Judy knew they would have to do some digging to get to the bottom of this case...

Detective Sergeant Judy McLeish wiped her forehead with her hand.

The whole country was basking in the tenth week of the hottest weather anyone could remember, and people were irritable and fed up.

As Judy approached her desk she noticed a spade on Bill's work surface, the blade shiny and the shop label still attached.

She frowned.

“Nice, isn’t it?” Bill said. “Got it for Marie for her birthday.”

Judy glanced up to see if he was joking. He wasn’t smiling.

“Are you sure?” she asked.

Bill nodded.

On the few occasions, she’d met Marie, Judy had got the impression that Bill’s wife didn’t share his fascination with allotments.

“She might prefer flowers or chocolates,” Judy said.

Bill narrowed his eyes.

“Nonsense, McLeish.”

“What did you get her last year, sir?”

“Shears. And very useful they’ve been.”

“For Marie?”

Bill looked at her, his mouth slightly open, but before he could answer a uniformed constable hurried over and handed him a note.

“A body,” Bill said, squinting at the paper. “On the Farlow Estate . . . at the site of an archaeological dig.”

Judy’s heart skipped.

She was tired of burglaries because doors were left open, and

complaints about banned hosepipe usage.

“Probably old bones,” Bill said. “But we’ll check.”

Judy wound down the window of Bill’s Allegro and leaned back in the passenger seat.

The noise of the road and other traffic made conversation impossible.

They entered the estate through impressive wrought-iron gates and followed the driveway until they reached the house.

“Where’s the dig?” Judy asked as they got out.

“Across the fields behind the house.”

They set off. The sun was hot on Judy’s head and soon rivulets of sweat ran down her back.

Bill looked worse. Too many pub lunches and too much deskwork had left him red in the face and breathing heavily.

“I thought the allotment kept you fit,” Judy said.

Bill winced as she took pity and slowed her pace.

In the distance, Judy could make out figures and a cluster of canvas

tents with a larger bell-shaped one in the centre.

Judy paused to take in the scene.

Several trenches had been dug, the piles of soil dry and dusty, but nobody was working as everyone crowded around the hole furthest from them.

The group was mostly young, sunburned and wore light clothing and floppy hats.

As Bill and Judy approached they stepped back to allow them access.

Two women were in a pit, clearing soil from round a body.

“Out!” Bill’s voice was shrill.

Everybody stared at him.

“We need experts,” Bill said.

One of the women in the pit looked up.

“We are experts,” she said mildly.

“You won’t get anyone more expert at digging things up than us.”

“You are destroying evidence. I insist you stop and get out,” Bill said.

The woman shrugged and held out a hand to the people above her, who pulled her out.

Judy stepped closer.

An elderly man with grey hair, dressed in a short-sleeved shirt and

slacks, his hands crossed over his chest, lay below.

Soil had been cleared from round him. He could have been asleep.

“Not old bones, then,” she murmured to Bill.

“Definitely not old bones.” The woman from the pit held out her hand.

“Doctor Michaela Southern. I’m leading this dig. We rarely find bones.

“This is a Roman site and bodies would likely have been incinerated or buried in a pit away from town.”

Judy saw Bill straighten up before answering.

“Doctor Southern,” he said. “Who found the body?”

“Well, we all did, really.” Dr Southern gave them a broad smile.

“Sonya, one of my students, was the first here this morning and she raised the alarm.”

Bill cocked an eyebrow.

“She shouted,” Dr Southern explained, “that the pit had been filled overnight.

“It’s taken us weeks to dig the trenches, so we were pretty annoyed.”

“And?”

“We started digging. The infill is easy to remove.

“After a few inches we realised something was buried in the trench.

“Everyone saw him exposed.”

“And do you recognise the body, Doctor Southern?” Bill asked.

“Oh, yes. It’s Mr Farlow. This is his estate.”

Two hours later, just as Judy thought she could take no more of standing out in the sun, the police doctor confirmed Mr Farlow had

died some time overnight, possibly from a blow to the back of the head.

None of the archaeologists admitted to hearing anything.

“We’ll go and see the Farlow family,” Bill said.

“Murder, sir?”

“Well, Mr Farlow didn’t bury himself, so it’s suspicious.” Bill frowned.

They plodded back towards the house, Judy wondering how the archaeologists survived outside all day.

A woman in a black uniform and white apron opened the door.

Judy blinked. She'd never been anywhere with servants before.

"We're here to speak with Mrs Farlow," Bill said.

The woman admitted them to a large, marbled hallway with a broad central staircase.

It was beautifully cool and Judy wanted to pull her shoes off and walk barefoot on the cold floor.

"Mrs Farlow will see you in the drawing-room," the woman in black said.

Judy followed Bill into a comfortable room with two big sofas on either side of a fireplace, dimly lit as the shutters were closed.

A WPC was sitting to one side, but Mrs Farlow did not appear upset at her husband's death.

"Mrs Farlow?" Bill said. "Inspector William Durban and Detective Sergeant Judy McLeish."

"Pleased to meet you," Mrs Farlow said.

"Can Ida get you a drink? Lemonade? It's very hot out, isn't it?"

“That would be most kind,” Bill said.

Judy stifled a sigh of relief.

“We’re sorry for your loss,” Bill said. “But I’m afraid we need to ask you some questions.”

“Certainly,” Mrs Farlow said.

“Please, have a seat.”

Judy sat down gratefully.

Now she had a closer look, she could see Mrs Farlow was considerably younger than the man in the trench.

She had long blonde hair that was tied back loosely in a ponytail and she wore a floral dress.

Judy's skirt and shirt were sticking to her after the walk back and forth across the fields and her hair was damp and limp.

There was a knock at the door and Ida came back in with a tray of tall glasses.

Judy accepted one and took a huge glug.

Bill put his glass down as he took out his notebook.

"When did you see your husband last, Mrs Farlow?"

"Yesterday. We had dinner together, as usual."

“And you didn’t notice he was missing this morning?”

Mrs Farlow shook her head.

“No, Inspector. We lead different lives. I don’t keep track of him.

“I was up early and went for a ride before it got too hot for me or the horses.”

“Did anyone see you?”

Mrs Farlow looked up.

“No. Oh, yes. Ida was just coming in to prepare breakfast as I returned. I expect she saw me.”

“You say you lived different lives?”
Bill asked, looking up at Mrs Farlow.

“I am the second wife, Inspector,”
Mrs Farlow said.

“Tristan loved his first wife and has
two children by her.

“She died fifteen years ago and he
remarried a younger woman to
have on his arm at events.

“His children didn’t approve, but
the marriage suits us both.

“He did what he wanted – which
this summer seems to have
involved digging up the grounds in
search of a Roman villa – and I
have my horses.”

Ida, the woman who admitted
them, was in the kitchen, a

basement room, with only small windows near the ceiling.

It was, however, fitted with units and a cooker.

It was a pleasant temperature to work in, but Ida wasn't working.

She was sitting in a chair and sobbing gently.

"Have you worked here long?" Bill asked.

"Thirty years," Ida said. "Mrs Farlow employed me. The first Mrs Farlow, that is."

She gave a small sniff.

"You'll have seen a lot of changes here," Bill said.

“Oh, yes. I’ve watched the children grow up.

“I helped nurse Mrs Farlow when she was sick.”

“And how are the new Mrs Farlow and Mr Farlow together?”

Ida’s mouth turned down.

“I don’t rightly know,” she said.

“They were amicable.

“No rows or anything but it isn’t like the first wife.”

“When did you last see Mr Farlow?”
Bill asked.

“Last night, when I served them dinner. Just a salad.

“Mrs Farlow says it’s too hot to eat at the moment, but I slipped a chicken breast on to Mr Farlow’s plate.”

“And Mrs Farlow?” Judy asked.

“When did you last see her?”

Ida sniffed again.

“This morning, I suppose,” she said.

“Just as I was coming across from my flat. She was coming back from the stables.

“Been out for a ride, no doubt. Prefers those horses to anything else, she does.”

“Where were you last night?” Bill asked.

“I finished clearing up after dinner and then went back to my flat and watched television.”

“You heard and saw nothing unusual?”

Ida shook her head.

“And finally,” Bill said, “do you have dealings with anyone at the dig?”

Ida shook her head.

“Mr Farlow gave them permission.

“Apparently there might be a Roman villa there, but as far as I know they’ve not found anything.

“Mr Farlow goes up there most days. Has me make cakes for them sometimes. ‘To energise them,’ he says.”

She thinned her lips.

“Come on, McLeish,” Bill said, setting off across the fields again, the chat with Ida appearing to have reinvigorated him.

“What are you thinking, sir?” she asked.

“Well, Mrs Farlow has no alibi. And nor does Ida.”

“I don’t think it was Ida,” Judy said.
“I’d say she was sweet on Mr Farlow.”

Bill looked at her in surprise.

“Didn’t you notice the way she talked about him?” Judy said.

“I suppose,” Bill said. “And I doubt she would gain from his death, but Mrs Farlow, on the other hand . . .”

“We don’t know that,” Judy said.

“Maybe he left her nothing and everything goes to his children?”

“We need to check,” Bill said. “But first I want to know when Mr Farlow was at the dig.”

When they got back to the site the students had left and the trench that had contained Mr Farlow’s body had been cleared.

They went into the largest tent.

“Doctor Southern?”

The archaeologist looked up from her clipboard.

“Inspector. You’re back.”

Judy watched the woman brush hair from her face with a grubby hand.

“A few questions,” Bill said. “We’ve been told that Mr Farlow spent a lot of time here at the dig.”

“He’s very interested. I think he hoped for a big find – a mosaic floor or a hypocaust system, perhaps.”

“Why?” Bill asked.

“He wanted to open the site to the public.

“If it’s a fine villa it could become quite popular, and then the café and the shop . . .” She made a moue of disgust.

“And have you found a villa?” Judy asked.

Dr Southern shook her head.

“A wall. We have a few bits of pottery identifiable as Roman, especially the neck of an amphora, but no villa.”

“Did Mr Farlow come here yesterday?” Bill asked.

Dr Southern ran a hand through her hair.

“He came every day to see how we were doing.

“He was very insistent that we keep digging. It’s draining in this heat.”

The following morning when Judy arrived at work she noticed the spade was no longer on Bill’s desk, but had been put against the wall.

Poor Marie, she thought. How many years had they been married?

“Morning, sir,” she said.

“Ah, McLeish,” Bill said. “We have an appointment with Farlow’s solicitor this morning.”

“Right, sir. You think the wife was involved?”

Bill’s eyes narrowed.

“Always start with family, McLeish. They have the most to lose or gain.

“She didn’t seem that cut up about his death.”

“But did she have the strength to put him in the trench and bury him?” Judy asked.

“She’s a horsewoman,” Bill pointed out.

“What about Ida?” Judy asked.

“I’m not ruling anyone out.”

At 11 a.m. they were shown into the solicitor’s office.

They sat in front of a huge mahogany desk that was piled with folders.

“What can you tell us about Mr Farlow’s estate?” Bill asked.

“The family is provided for. Mrs Farlow stays in the house until her death, when it passes to the children.

“Mr Farlow also made a provision for each of them of fifty thousand pounds.”

Bill drew in a breath through his teeth.

“Not an insubstantial sum,” he said. “Mr Farlow didn’t make any changes to his will recently?”

“No.” The solicitor steepled his fingers.

“But when I last saw him I did get the feeling that all might not have been well.”

“What do you make of that?” Bill asked when they were back on the street.

“The money gives the children a motive,” Judy said.

“Mrs Farlow is no better or worse off.”

“We should interview the children next,” Bill said.

“Or we could do a little more digging,” Judy said. “I’d like to see Ida again.”

“OK,” Bill said. “I’ll visit the children. They’re local, I believe. I’ll catch you later.”

Judy went back to the Farlow Estate.

“Mrs Farlow isn’t here,” Ida said as she opened the door.

“It’s you I’d like to speak to,” Judy said.

Ida invited her inside, but before she could lead the way to the basement, Judy stopped and pointed at an alcove in the hallway.

“That looks as if it should contain something,” she said.

Ida appeared flustered.

“It used to. Mr Farlow said he was taking them for valuation.

“There was a bronze statue either side.”

“How long have they been gone?” Judy asked.

“A while,” Ida admitted.

“Have other things vanished?”

Ida pressed her lips together.

“Yes. Several pictures from upstairs and some silverware.

“And the other day I couldn’t see the first Mrs Farlow’s jewellery.”

When Judy got back to the office she was buzzing with what she’d found.

Bill slung his jacket over the back of his chair and slumped down.

“Well, the children don’t need the inheritance,” he said. “Both are pretty well heeled.

Judy explained what she’d found out.

“Good work, McLeish,” Bill said and Judy felt a flush of warmth that for once wasn’t related to the weather.

“The bank tomorrow,” Bill said.

Next morning they were shown into the bank manager’s office.

He was reluctant to divulge information.

“It’s a murder inquiry,” Bill said. He sat upright and glared at the manager.

“Yes, but . . .”

“I can get the necessary authority,” Bill said. “And I can make a big song and dance about it. Bring lots of uniforms.”

“That won’t be necessary.” The bank manager gave a tight smile.

“Mr Farlow was having liquidity problems. A few investments had gone belly up.

“But he told me he had a new project on the go. It was going to create a steady income.”

“Did he say what it involved?” Bill asked.

“Well, there was some capital outlay.

“He took a big chunk of the remaining funds from his account to subsidise whatever it was. I

advised against it, but he was insistent.”

“Insistent,” Bill said when they were back in the car.

“Doctor Southern used that term, too. I rather think Mr Farlow’s insistence was his downfall.”

“You think it was someone from the dig?” Judy asked.

“Could be,” Bill said.

It was late in the afternoon when Judy and Bill arrived at the site again.

“Have you found a villa, Doctor Southern?” Bill asked.

“Not you as well.” Dr Southern put her hands on her hips.

“These things take time.”

“Do you think you will find anything?”

Dr Southern made a face.

“I’m not sure,” she said.

“And did that bother Mr Farlow, do you think?”

Judy saw Dr Southern pause before answering.

“He wasn’t happy,” she conceded.

“Was he putting pressure on you?”

For a moment it looked as if Dr Southern wouldn't answer but then her shoulders appeared to sink.

"He was a bully," she said. "He had no idea how a dig works and how unusual it is to make a great find.

"We argued. He pushed me. I pushed back. He fell and banged his head . . ."

"And you didn't get help?"

"There was no point. It was too late. But he brought it on himself."

"We'll have to let a jury decide that one," Bill said. "Cuff her, Sergeant."

“Do you know, sir, you can get memberships to visit historic houses and Roman villas and such?” Judy said on the drive back to the station.

“I’ve always fancied being able to visit places like that whenever I wanted.”

A month later Judy was out in town.

The air had an unusual feel. Then a cool breeze ruffled her hair and a drop of rain fell from the sky.

Judy looked up and smiled.

She caught the eye of a woman next to her and realised it was Marie.

“Judy!” Marie said. “I believe I owe you thanks.”

“Me? Whatever for?”

“Bill gave me a membership for my birthday.

“Now we can visit historic houses and castles, if I can get him away from the allotment.

“When I told him it was the best present he’d given me, he confessed the idea had come from you.”

“It came from a case, actually,” Judy said. “But I’m glad you approve.”

As Marie smiled and waved, Judy walked on.

I wonder what Bill did with the spade, she thought.

Perhaps he'd had enough of digging for a while.